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June 3, 2021

Mr. Richard Y. Stevens

132 Lochwood West Drive

Cary, NC 27511

Dear Mr. Stevens:

I am writing to you and your fellow board members to applaud the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill (UNC-Chapel Hill) board of trustee's recent decision not to award tenure-upon-hire to Nikole Hannah-Jones.

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is following the news of your decision closely. For over 25 years, ACTA has proudly promoted the importance of academic excellence, academic freedom, and academic accountability to institutions of higher learning in the United States. ACTA encourages all trustees to exercise their fiduciary duty on behalf of students and taxpayers, and, when necessary, to make tough decisions for the benefit of the public. This you have done.

You are in a unique position to be independent arbiters who can balance competing institutional demands with the public interest. Good governance requires more than being a rubber stamp for decisions that affect the quality of education at your institution. Your leadership and confidence in your decision is exemplary. I encourage you to read the enclosed letter to the editor I recently published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* in support of the board's decision.

We hope that you will always remain steadfast in your commitment to academic excellence.

PROMOTING ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND EXCELLENCE

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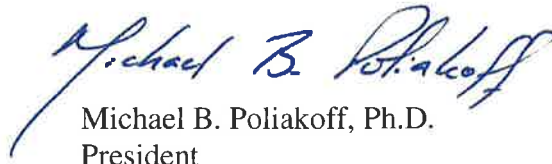
Mr. Richard Y. Stevens

June 3, 2021

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ACTA would be delighted to discuss further. Should you have any questions or wish to offer feedback, please contact me at **Michael.Poliakoff@GoACTA.org** or **(202) 467-6787**.

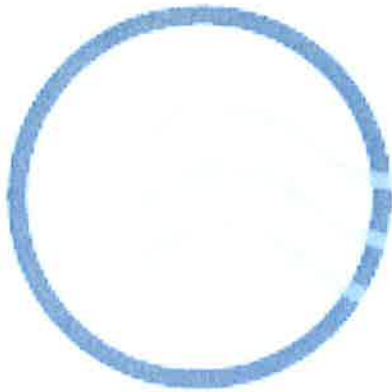
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael B. Poliakoff". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" being the most prominent.

Michael B. Poliakoff, Ph.D.

President

Enclosure: Don't Rush to Assume Politics Was Behind UNC Board's Decision to Deny Tenure to Hannah-Jones



Letters

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Don't Rush to Assume Politics Was Behind UNC Board's Decision to Deny Tenure to Hannah-Jones

MAY 25, 2021

To the Editor:

Your recent article covering the decision by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Board of Trustees not to award tenure to Nikole Hannah-Jones misses a crucial point (["Her '1619' Project Is a Political Lightning Rod. It May Have Cost Her Tenure," *The Chronicle*, May 19](#)). A university's board of trustees is ultimately responsible for the governance of the institution and must ensure that a tenure appointment is based on time-honored academic expectations.

Charles G. Duckett — trustee and chairman of the university-affairs committee — was right: "Shared governance means people have different responsibilities. And shared governance does not mean that we just have to sit here and rubber-stamp everything that comes our way." Effective leadership requires an active and deliberative board. Shared governance is not byword for deference, but rather

describes an inclusive and transparent decision-making process the responsibility for which lies with the board.

University boards at times act as bulwark against abuses in the tenure process. In 2002, faculty peers at Brooklyn College sought to deny tenure to KC Johnson, an eminent teacher and scholar, on the grounds of a perceived “[lack of collegiality.](#)” Read, the thinly veiled political disaffection of his colleagues. The chairman of the history department would later state that this effort had been spearheaded by a group of “academic terrorists” within the department. After a public outcry, Johnson appealed the decision to the chancellor of the City University of New York system and was eventually promoted with the unanimous support of the CUNY board.

Hannah-Jones’s journalism has been criticized by a roster of [America’s most eminent historians](#) from both sides of the political aisle, and it is unapologetically incendiary. The [retractions](#) that have accompanied Hannah-Jones’s ‘magnum opus’ have been some of the most noteworthy in recent memory, particularly given that the project’s own [fact checkers](#) highlighted multiple inaccuracies prior to publication. In the case of KC Johnson, the board turned a biased political decision into an objective academic decision. Before rushing to judge the UNC board’s decision as “political,” it behooves us to entertain the possibility that they protected academic integrity and standards against fashionable campus politics.

Michael B. Poliakoff
President
American Council of Trustees and Alumni
Washington